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## WOMEN EDUCATION IN GHANA: A POST 2000 STUDY

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### ABSTRACT:

*The issue of female education has been an area of concern among policy makers in Ghana since independence. This article will analyze the state of women education in Ghana post 2000. The year 2000 is a landmark in two senses - Firstly, the year witnessed a watershed event in Ghana's democratic development, with the first peaceful transfer of power via the ballot box. Secondly, at international level, the year witnessed the launch of millennium declaration, which laid the genesis of Millennium development goals, a set of eight goals with education as one of the key goals for developing human capital. However, MDGs were soon replaced by Sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015, with a target of fulfilling 17 goals worldwide including gender equality and quality of education to be achieved by 2030. Within this backdrop, the article will dissect the condition of women education in Ghana and will scrutinize the government interventions in this regard.*



**KEYWORDS:** Education reform, universal basic education, national youth policy, education strategic plan, sustainable development goal.

### INTRODUCTION

Gender has been the key determinant to assess the dispersion of education among population in any country. As far as Ghana is concerned, the low enrollment ratio and high dropout ratio among girls as compared to boys illustrates the differential access of formal education in the country. Though in comparison to many developing countries, Ghana is recognized of adopting a commendable education policy with special emphasis on women and girl child, still female education has been a key area of concern.

### STATE OF WOMEN EDUCATION POST 2000

The year 2000, was a landmark event in the history of Ghanaian politics. This year witnessed the historic change of regime with John Kufuor succeeding Jerry Rawlings as the second president of the Fourth Republic. A milestone was established since this was the first peaceful transition of power in the country.

With the change of guards in 2000, 'Ministry for Women and Children's Affairs'(MWCA) got established in 2001, which got renamed as 'Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection' in 2013.

With its aim to refurbish societal attitude towards making it more gender sensitive, the Ministry Initiated extensive sensitization, educational and advocacy programmes. The Ministry is mandated to address women and children's issues and formulate policies and guidelines accordingly. Since economic situation and educational attainment especially regarding women are closely linked, therefore, Ministry soon after launched a micro-finance credit scheme aiming to improve the economic status of rural women in Ghana. In this regard, this scheme becomes all the more important.

Soon after coming to power, The New Patriotic Party under president John Kufuor introduced the 'Women's Development Fund' which aimed at enhancing the financial and economic viability of several banks especially those in rural areas. This led to the improvement of economic and social conditions of women. Concerned survey research had demonstrated that fund amassed from the scheme was used by beneficiaries for enrolling their wards in schools. Thus, introduction of this fund to a large extent helped in alleviating women out of their ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that the 1992 constitution along with the 'Long Term Development Plan' or 'Ghana Vision 2020' also envisages a policy framework aimed at promoting and protecting women rights by addressing the issue of inequitable access to social, political, and economic opportunity and service delivery.

As far as Ghana's current education reforms are concerned, gender specific curriculum is being given importance. New programmes on Population and Family Life Education (PFLE) have been introduced which involves gender issues as its key component. Impetus is given to incorporate contextual issues such as environment, quality of life, sustainable use of resources, food production and security, agriculture, forestry etc. into the curriculum, which are becoming much popular among females. It is widely recognized worldwide that women can play a positive role in nurturing a sound environmental management. Thus, positive interventions need to be made to sensitize the population to transform the negative cultural perceptions and stereotyping of women. Once this traditional stereotyping regarding women gets cornered, educational attainment of women can be improved.<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, the new education reform policy was launched. According to the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) the key points of this education policy known as 'Education Reform 2007' were - "The Universal Basic Education included 2 years for kindergarten, 6 years for primary school and 3 years of Junior High School (JHS) a total of 11 years. Now up to Lower Primary Ghanaian and English would be the applicable languages. Basic education will comprise of numeracy, Creative Arts and Problem-Solving Skills."<sup>3</sup>

Some other key elements of the policy according to the RGS document were - "JHS students after entering Senior High School (SHS), may choose General Education or Technical, Vocational, and Agricultural Education, and Training (TVET). They can even join an apprenticeship programme. In the SHS apart from core subjects these chosen subjects would be offered for four years."<sup>4</sup>

Further the policy also talked about - "Improvement and upgradation of training colleges for teachers with special incentives for teachers in rural schools. To ensure equality of education National Inspectorate Board (NIB) was established which would do inspections in schools. Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and cost-sharing were maintained with a increase in library and distance education facilities. More importance is given to ICT and science and technology. At the same time more importance is given to participation of private actors in educational services."<sup>5</sup>

All the key provisions of new education policy 2007, on one hand aimed at enhancing quality education among Ghanaian society, on the other hand, through its mandate of ensuring 'Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education', tried to expand the access to education to women population.

However, with New Democratic Congress (NDC) coming into power after 2008 general elections, few changes were made in the Education Act 2007. The tenure of Senior High School was reduced from four years to three years.<sup>6</sup>

In 2010, Ghana's 'National Youth Policy' was launched which aimed at mainstreaming education among the youth. Under the said policy different priority areas have been identified. According to the National Youth Policy of Ghana these are - 'Education and Skills Training', 'Science, Research and Technology', 'Information and Communication Technology', 'Youth and Employment', 'Entrepreneurial

Development', 'Youth in Modern Agriculture', 'Gender Mainstreaming', 'Environment', 'Health, HIV and AIDS', 'Mentoring'.<sup>7</sup> Apart from these the policy also included, "Networking and Partnership', 'Arts and Culture', 'Governance, Democracy, and Leadership', 'Sports and Recreation', 'Youth in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building', 'National Youth Week', 'Youth and Vulnerability' and 'Youth, Patriotism and Volunteerism'.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the objective of the above policy was to empower the youth including women, to develop their personality to its fullest and to imbibe creativity, innovation, and self-esteem. Also, gender mainstreaming as a key priority area indicates the increased sensitivity of policy makers towards gender issues and concerns.<sup>9</sup>

Despite of these positive government interventions, it was reported that though there was an overall increase in the school enrolment ratio, yet there were some children, especially those suffering with disabilities, who were secluded from mainstream education. Here girl child suffering from disability becomes even more vulnerable. In 2009, 'Inclusive Education' was implemented with the aim to assimilate these sections of child population and provide them special support system. After its implementation in 3 regions (Greater Accra, Central and Eastern) it was further implemented in approximately 529 schools by 2011.<sup>10</sup>

In 2013, the 'Inclusive Education Policy' (IEP) was declared which aimed to provide all children (irrespective of differences in age, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, etc.), right to access basic education to promote an inclusive society. This was a national legally binding policy with the objective to establish special schools as effective resource center, to make school infrastructure, environment, and curriculum learner friendly and to ensure capacity building training among teachers.<sup>11</sup>

Soon in consonance with six Dakar goals, the Ghanaian government launched the 'Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015' (ESP) with the aim to achieve education for all. This plan was underpinned by ten broad policy goals with four broad areas of focus namely – "(i) Equitable access to education (ii) quality of education, (iii) education management (iv) Science, technology and TVET."<sup>12</sup>

With the policy objective of providing equitable educational opportunities, the 'ESP 2003-2015' aims to raise the awareness regarding the importance of girl's education.<sup>13</sup>

However, soon the government revised the 'ESP 2003-2015' to 'ESP 2010-2020'. Among others, one of the main guiding principles of the ESP 2010-20 was to eliminate social exclusion and poverty-based gender and other disparities. One of its sub sectors policies includes encouraging Inclusive Education (IE) and Special Educational Needs (SpED) with a very ambitious target to increase enrolment of girls with disabilities at the pre-tertiary levels. These time-based targets do signify government commitment towards ensuring education to all especially among female populace.<sup>14</sup>

## DATA ANALYSIS

Table-1

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Government expenditure on education</b>										
as % of GDP	8.1	7.9	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.5	3.6	4	...	...
as % of total government expenditure	30.6	37.5	21.2	21	23.8	22.1	20.1	18.6	...	...
<b>Government expenditure per student (in PPP\$)</b>										
Primary education	806.1	537.6	343.2	318.1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Initial government funding per secondary student PPP\$	856.9	1437	973.6	1050.8	...	...	...	...	...	...
Initial government funding per tertiary student PPP\$	3127	4977.9	3495.5	3004.6	...	...	...	...	...	...

**Source:** UNESCO data. <http://uis.unesco.org/en/country/gh?theme=education-and-literacy>.

The ability of government to improve the quality and quantity of education depends upon its expenditure on this crucial sector. According to the Human Development Report 2015, public expenditure on education (as of % of GDP) was estimated 8.1 percent for the years 2005 to 2014.<sup>15</sup>

Going by the UNESCO data(Table-1) it is evident that public expenditure on education (as of % of GDP) has drastically decreased from 8.1 percent in year 2011 to 4 percent in 2018. UNESCO data also suggests that percentage of government expenditure on education out of total government expenditure showed an increase from 30.6 percent in year 2011 to 37.5 percent in year 2012 and then saw the subsequent decrease as low as 18.6 percent in 2018.

Taking a deeper analysis, table-1 further indicates that the government expenditure per student in terms of PPP\$ at primary level has also shown a decrease from 806.1 in year 2011 to 318.1 in year 2014.

Similarly, if we analyze the statistics initial government funding per secondary student PPP\$, it seems bit fluctuating. It has shown a drastic increase from 856.9 in 2011 to 1437 in 2012 and then witnessed a dip to 973.6 in 2013 and again an increase to 1050.8 in 2014. Table-1 also indicates that the initial government funding per tertiary student in terms of PPP\$ also saw similar fluctuation.

According to the Table-1 the overall decrease in public expenditure on education (as of % of GDP) and decline of government expenditure on education (as percentage of total government expenditure) from 2011-2018, indicates the comparative low importance given to education sector by policy makers over years. The dismal condition of education among children especially girl population seems reflective of this unreasonable situation. Also, this becomes quite intriguing that two very ambitious government interventions had already started namely, 'Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015' and 'Education Strategic Plan 2010-2020'.

The state of women education in Ghana can be accessed in a better way if we try to access the progress in the said field in terms of 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs). Adopted by the United Nations in 2015, these set of global goals, pledges for a universal call of action to end poverty, hunger, ensure good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water, sanitation, affordable and clean energy, and apart from other objectives ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Among these 17 goals, goal no 4 and goal no 5, which aims at quality education and gender equality respectively holds key relevance in a developing societies like Ghana. As per UNDP, as far as primary school enrollment is concerned, among all developing countries; Sub Saharan Africa, of which Ghana is a part, is showing commendable progress –an estimated 42 percent in 1990 and reached 78 percent in 2012. But large number of disparities still exists. Not only income disparity but gender inequality appears to be a key determinant for accessing the state of education especially among females in Ghana.<sup>16</sup>

**Table-2**

<b>SDG 4.4 - Population with at least some secondary education (% ages 25 and older)</b>			
	2010	2005-2014	2015-2019
Female	33.9	45.2	55.7
Male	81.1	64.7	71.6
<b>Youth Literacy Rate (% ages 15-24)</b>			
	2005-2013		
Female	83.2		
Male	88.3		

**Source:** Human Development Report 2010, p.158; Human Development Report 2015, pp.226, 244; Human Development Report 2020, p.363

It is also crucial to note that despite of some serious government interventions, Ghana still demonstrates gender disparity regarding education. Statistics regarding SDG 4.4 (Table-2) shows that as far as population with at least some secondary education is concerned, a sharp disparity between male and female is being witnessed. The percentage of females as compared to males with at least some

secondary education has been low. The statistics are 33.9 percent female as compared to 81.1 percent males in 2010. It was estimated 45.2 percent females as compared to 64.7 percent males during 2005-2014. Further estimates show 55.7 percent females as compared to 71.6 percent males for the years 2015 to 2019.

Similarly, as far as, youth literacy rate (youth being considered from age of 15 to 24) is concerned, the said Table-2 shows that it is estimated 83.2 percent for females as compared to 88.3 percent for males from 2005 to 2013.

**Table-3**

	2008	2014	2019
<b>Gender Inequality Index Rank</b>	114	127	135

**Source:** Human Development Report 2010, p.158; Human Development Report 2015, p.226; Human Development Report 2020, p.263.

Ghana's rank in Gender Inequality index has also shown a decrease, which reflects the gender inequality in terms of reproductive health, empowerment, and labor market participation, which is linked with education. According to the Table-3, in 2008 while Ghana's rank was 114, it decreased to 127 in 2014 and further to 135 in year 2019, as per Human Development reports 2010, 2015 and 2020.

**Table-4**

	2005-2008	2008-2014	2010-2019
<b>SDG - 4.c.</b> The Percentage of trained primary school teachers	49.1	52	62
<b>SDG - 4.a</b> Quality of education (Percentage of Schools with access to the Internet)			
<b>Primary</b>			8
<b>Secondary</b>			20

**Source:** Human Development Report 2020, p.371; Human Development Report 2015, p.244; Human Development Report 2010, p.194.

As per Human Development Report 2010, 2015 and 2020, if we investigate the progress as far as Sustainable Development Goal or SDG - 4 c (i.e., percentage of trained primary school teachers) is concerned, Ghana has shown an increase in the percentage of trained primary school teachers from 49.1 percent in 2005-08, 52 percent in 2008-14 to further 62 percent in 2010-19 (Table-4). In case of SDG - 4 a (i.e., Quality of education) there were 8 percent primary and 20 percent secondary Schools were equipped with access to the Internet.

**Table-5**

<b>Pupil-Teacher ratio in primary school (pupils per teacher)</b>			
Years	2005-2008	2008-2014	2010-2019
Students per teacher	32.2	30	27

**Source:** Human Development Report 2010, p.194; Human Development Report 2015, p.244; Human Development Report 2020, p.371.

The Table-5 indicates the teacher pupil ratio in Ghana, which is also a determinant in estimating the quality of education. The number of students per teacher witnessed the decline from 32.2 during 2005-2008 to 30 during years 2008-2014 to further 27 during 2010-2019.

An improvement in these important parameters, off course gives optimism as far as state of education and especially women education is concerned provided women are given opportunity to enter the gateways of formal education.

### KEY CHALLENGES TO WOMEN EDUCATION IN GHANA

Like in many underdeveloped and developing countries around the globe, women in Ghana still face numerous challenges including socio-cultural barriers towards their path of achieving education. As per Oxfam report 2020, an average girl in Ghana only receives four years of education. Early marriage, pregnancy, poverty, and sexual harassment are all barriers that force girls to drop out of school before the end of junior high.<sup>17</sup> This indicates that transition of women into mainstream development process is still very slow in Ghana.

There are numerous challenges of women education in Ghana. Many of these challenges are common and visible around the globe in one or the other way. Key challenges in the path of women education in Ghana are:

- Traditional socio-cultural belief of considering women primarily as a childbearing agent contributes to their underdevelopment and restrict them from accumulating various benefits including education. Even the statistics of high rate of female fertility during 1980's illustrates the fact that women primary role was that of reproduction.
- Early marriage and teenage pregnancy also restrict girls access to formal education and many times is seen as one of the reasons for their high school dropout rate.
- Strict gender stereotyping also emerges as a key obstacle. Social norms stemming out of entrenched patriarchy the notion of public private divide deprives women of quality education since public sphere is considered a prerogative of males and females are expected to stay secluded within four walls of house. Thus, there is a need to change the conscious of people and make society more open and egalitarian, which of course would be a serious challenge.
- Violence against women is another serious challenge in the path of women education. Cutting across age, socio-economic status, women face different forms of violence, which prohibits them to gain education. Women not only face physical violence but also different levels of emotional, psychological, and economic violence. They face multiple forms of violence such as domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation and even violence from cultural practices such as trokosi and witchcraft.
- Poverty is another inhibiting factor in the path of female education. It has often been seen that parents are often reluctant to send their daughters to school due to lower income level and need girls for additional labour in farm or at home.
- There are some systemic challenges as well in the path of female education in Ghana. Neither school infrastructure nor basic amenities are gender sensitive and hardly take into consideration girl's special needs and interests. At the same time there is lack of gender sensitization among faculties and teachers which further reduces girl's interest in formal education and makes them passive within classroom settings.<sup>18</sup>

Within such socio-cultural setting, either access of women into formal education structure becomes difficult or their school dropout rates increases. All this makes access of formal education among women still a challenging task.

### WAY FORWARD

A concerted effort both from the side of government and civil society is needed to address this problem. A probable way ahead could be:

- Since family is the primary training place where a child starts learning, thus it is important that elder women should stop transplanting the inferior treatment given to girls/women and its acceptance within the family. They should in fact treat young girls and boys as equals by not discriminating them.<sup>19</sup>

- Apart from free, compulsory, technical, vocational, and skill-based education, value-based education should also be taught in schools and higher education so that the gender stereo type could change.<sup>20</sup>
- There is a need for 'complete mental transformation' or 'human transformation' in the society. Here male members of the society have an important role to play. The male members in family, society and at all levels of decision making must accept and treat women as equal. It means power sharing in family, society, workplace etc. It also means acknowledging and appreciating women as the most important part of the family and society.<sup>21</sup>
- Government and other state and non-state actors should come forward to eradicate socio-cultural-economic barriers and promote women education by PP, PA, EPI, PM and DNP (Policy Planning, Policy Awareness, Effective Policy Implementation, Policy Monitoring and Demand for New Policies). Another very important thing here is that the beneficiaries i.e., women should be a part of the entire decision-making process.<sup>22</sup>
- Women's role in design making positions and politics need to be increased. So that, they will make appropriate policies for themselves, and their effective implementation will be checked time to time by them.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

A great humanist, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, has rightly said that "The age of male dominance is over, and we are now living in the age of women."<sup>24</sup> This age of women demands equal status to women in almost all spheres of life, viz. social, political, and economic. However, many developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America are still struggling to ensure their women population a status of equal co-citizen and co-contributor in nation building. Education off course plays a very vital role in enabling women to achieve such position of dignity in society. The government of Ghana since independence has taken several positive interventions including 'Accelerated Development Plan for Education', 'Education Act of 1961', 'National Secondary School Project', 'Cost- Recovery-Measures', 'Substantial Public Education Program for Women', 'The Education Reform of 1987' prior to 2000.

The post 2000 Ghana witnessed various initiatives by government, especially in terms of enforcement of women development fund, Free compulsory universal basic education programme 1996-2005, programmes on Population and Family Life Education (PFLE), New Educational Reform of 2007, National Youth Policy of 2010, Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015, Education Strategic Plan 2010-20 etc. Keeping with the spirit of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and based on Women Agenda 2030, 'the Agenda 2030: Women in Power and Decision Making' was launched by Ghanaian government in 2015 that created a road map for next 15 years in Ghana. It highlights that almost 60 per cent of ministerial portfolios (especially Finance, Energy, Education and Health) should be held by women. The agenda also pledges to ensure that almost 60 per cent of Parliamentary seats, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives post, and Unit Committee members needs to be acquired by women. In addition to this, the agenda targets a female President or Vice President by 2030 to ensure fair and equal participation of women in decision making and policy making.<sup>25</sup>

All these positive government interventions could be a step towards achieving sustainable development goals of establishing quality education and gender equality. However, keeping into mind the patriarchal social order, female illiteracy, and gender specific social barriers, the task appears challenging and thus requires sincere efforts from all the three major stakeholders- the political executive, the bureaucracy, and citizens.

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